

REMARKS

The Applicants thank the Examiner for the thorough examination of the application. No new matter is believed to be added to the application by this Amendment.

Status of the Claims

Claims 1-4 and 6-9 are pending in the application. Claims 5 and 10-13 are canceled by this Amendment. Claim 1 has been amended to incorporate the subject matter of allowable claim 5 (now canceled). Claims 6 and 7 have been amended so as not to depend upon a canceled claim.

Election/Restriction

The Examiner has restricted the claims into the following two groups:

- Group I - Claims 1-9, drawn to a method; and
- Group II - Claims 10-13 drawn to an apparatus.

Applicants affirm the election of Group I (claims 1-9) with traverse. The method of Group I and the apparatus of Group II are so intimately interrelated that no undue burden is placed on the Examiner. However, in order to expedite the prosecution, claims 10-13 have been canceled by this Amendment.

Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) Over Cucheran, Kurihara and Ebara

Claims 1-3 and 6-9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being obvious over Cucheran (U.S. Patent No. 5,855,840) in view of Kurihara (U.S. Patent No. 5,612,067) and Ebara (U.S. Patent No. 5,371,132).

Applicants respectfully traverse.

Allowable claim 5 has been canceled and its subject matter has been incorporated into independent claim 1. Claim 5 was free of this rejection over Cucheran, Kurihara and Ebara and is therefore instantly patentable over these references. Claims depending upon independent claim 1 are patentable for at least the above reasons.

Also, Applicants respectfully note that Cucheran (U.S. Patent No. 5,855,840) is a divisional of U.S. Patent No. 5,765,737, which was made of record in the Information Disclosure Statement filed May 25, 2001.

This rejection is overcome and withdrawal thereof is respectfully requested.

Information Disclosure Statements

The Applicants thank the Examiner for considering the Information Disclosure Statements filed May 25, 2001 and March 5, 2003 and for making the initialed PTO-1449 forms of record in the application in the Office Action mailed March 24, 2004.

The Drawings

The Examiner is respectfully requested to indicate whether the drawing figures are acceptable in the next official action.

Conclusion

All of the Examiner's requirements have been addressed and the rejection has been successfully traversed. No issues remain. The Examiner is accordingly respectfully requested to allow the application.

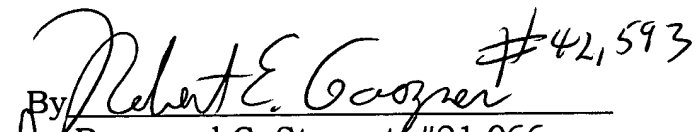
Should there be any outstanding matters that need to be resolved in the present application, the Examiner is respectfully requested to contact Robert E. Goozner, Ph.D. (Reg. No. 42,593) at the telephone number of the undersigned below, to conduct an interview in an effort to expedite prosecution in connection with the present application.

Pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.17 and 1.136(a), Applicant(s) respectfully petition(s) for a three (3) month extension of time for filing a reply in connection with the present application, and the required fee of \$950.00 is attached hereto.

If necessary, the Commissioner is hereby authorized in this, concurrent, and future replies, to charge payment or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 02-2448 for any additional fees required under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17; particularly, extension of time fees.

Respectfully submitted,

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0649-0785P

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Attachment(s):

(Rev. 02/12/2004)